

If I could have the indulgence of doing that before I serve as the Presiding Officer, I would appreciate that from the Senator.

Mr. DOMENICI. Obviously, we have to get consent because I am next.

I ask unanimous consent that Senator MURKOWSKI be given 3 minutes at this point and then the Senator from New Mexico be recognized for up to 10 minutes, followed by Senator HARKIN. Is that correct, the Senator wants to be next after the Senator from New Mexico?

Mr. HARKIN. Yes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DOMENICI. I thank the Chair. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

#### RURAL TEACHER HOUSING ACT OF 2005

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues this afternoon.

I rise today to talk about a bill that I introduced last week that will have a profound effect on the retention of teachers, administrators, and other school staff in remote and rural areas of Alaska. This bill is the Rural Teacher Housing Act of 2005.

In rural areas of Alaska, we have school districts that face enormous challenges of recruiting and retaining teachers, administrators, and other school staff. The challenges lie primarily in the lack of housing. In one particular year, in the Lower Kuskokwim School District in western Alaska, they hired one teacher for every six who decided not to accept job offers. Half of those applicants who did not accept a teaching position in that district indicated that their decision was related to the lack of housing. When we talk about lack of housing, it is not they cannot find an apartment that is to their suiting or to their liking, the fact of the matter is there is no housing available.

In 2003, I had the opportunity to travel through rural Alaska with then-Secretary of Education Rod Paige. I took him there because I wanted him to see the challenges of educating children in such a remote and rural environment. We went to the village school in Savoonga. We met the principal there. Secretary Paige was overwhelmed when the principal showed him the broom closet in the school, not to show him the school supplies but to let him know that this is where the principal of the school lived, in the broom closet in the school. This was because there was no housing in Savoonga for the teachers.

We met the special education teacher at the school, and she brought out the mattress that she sleeps on in her classroom every night. She does not have a home to go to. She does not have a space to call her own. Her classroom is her room, her house, her bed.

The other teachers at the school shared housing in a single home.

When one thinks about that in terms of what the teachers do, needless to say there is no place for their spouse, so these teachers who are married—the teachers might be married, but the spouse might be living in another part of the State or, in the principal's case, his wife lived out of State.

Unfortunately, Savoonga is not an isolated example of the teacher housing situation in rural Alaska. Rural Alaska school districts experience a high rate of teacher turnover due primarily to the lack of housing. Turnover is as high as 30 percent each year in some of the rural areas with housing issues being a major factor.

So the question is, How can we expect our kids to receive a quality education when we cannot get good teachers to stay? How can we meet the mandates of No Child Left Behind in such an educational environment?

Clearly, the lack of teacher housing in rural Alaska is an issue that must be addressed in order to ensure that children in the rural parts of the State receive the same level of education as their peers in more urban settings.

My bill authorizes the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide teacher housing funds to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, which is the State of Alaska's public housing agency. In turn, the corporation is authorized to provide grant and loan funds to rural school districts in Alaska for teaching housing projects. This legislation will allow the school districts in rural Alaska to address the housing shortage in the following ways: They can construct housing units, purchase housing units, lease housing units, rehabilitate, purchase or lease property on which the units can be constructed. They can repay loans secured for teacher housing projects and conduct other activities normally related to the construction, purchase, and rehabilitation of the teacher housing projects.

This also includes transporting construction equipment and materials to and from the communities in which these projects occur, which in the State is a particular concern because most of these communities are accessible only by air or water. Eligible school districts that accept funds under this legislation will be required to provide the housing to teachers, administrators, other school staffs, and members of their households. It is imperative that we address this important issue and allow the disbursement of funds to be handled at the State level. The quality of the education of our rural students is at stake.

I thank my colleagues and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from New Mexico is recognized.

#### SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I rise to congratulate the majority leader of the Senate, BILL FRIST. I do not do this because he is my good friend but because I want to make sure that we all understand that we have had an exceptionally productive legislative year. I thank him especially for his critical help in passing legislation in areas where I have been primarily responsible. In addition to that, I want to summarize the things that have been done this year under his leadership.

The reason I came to talk about this is because there is such an overwhelming, high-octane negativism in the air that one would hardly know the Senate was at work. There is so much politics going on that one would wonder whether the Senate is even functioning. Even on the floor there is an awful lot of polarization that has occurred. I do not say this in any real accusatory sense. It is true.

In spite of that, in his own way, the majority leader has very quietly and with very mature feelings and inordinate ability grasped details of legislation and has contributed immensely to a success story.

I would like to start by talking about matters that this Senator has particularly been involved in. We were able to pass in this body an Energy Policy Act. We have been working at that for almost a decade, but for the last 3 years we have tried each year and failed. This year, we got it done.

Obviously, something was done differently. That is, we attempted to create a bipartisan bill in the committee under my chairmanship, with the help of Senator BINGAMAN, and the majority leader, as leader in the Senate, should take great pride in that accomplishment, and we should as a Senate.

In addition, as it pertains to things the Senator from New Mexico works on, we sent to the President for his signature an appropriations bill that is called Energy and Water appropriations. That bill contained hundreds of millions of dollars that go to the storm-ravaged gulf coast. It is there to continue critical projects that are already started and moving along. They are projects that are needed. They are not part of the great concern about how much may be spent or should not be spent. These are public works projects in that four-State area that are important. I think that is very good.

In that bill, the nuclear armament programs of the United States went through to the President of the United States and also some very important nuclear nonproliferation activities.

In addition, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee was part of a reconciliation bill—let us call that the deficit reduction bill—that passed. The occupant of the chair in the committee that we served on contributed a piece of that. For the first time, we sent in such a bill for the start-up of the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge activity